

# Nationalism in the Poems of Maithili Sharan Gupt

**Dr. Seema Kashyap**

Associate Professor  
Department of English  
Govt. College Bundi (Raj)

## Abstract

At the times of national crisis authors and poets have successfully used the medium of literature to publicize or gain support for political upheavals or new ideologies. This paper seeks to examine the element of nationalism in the poems of Maithili Sharan Gupt and discuss the various perspectives of nationalism. Nationalism is an enigmatic notion and writers have grappled with the idea of 'nation' before independence in diverse ways. While it is important to understand the basic criteria that define nationalism it is equally vital to understand the fundamental difference between the ideas that define a sovereign geographical entity in the West as a nation as compared to the East

**Keywords :- nationalism, sovereign, nation, ideologies, independence**

The literature of a country reflects its values, collective and cultural consciousness, and transitions in social mindsets as well as the nationalist spirit. Literature is also the medium which can effectively inspire and change social mindsets or infuse a nationalist spirit in people, provoke political upheavals or manifest new ideologies. At the times of national crisis authors and poets have successfully used the medium of literature to publicize or gain support for political upheavals or new ideologies. This paper seeks to examine the element of nationalism in the poems of Maithili Sharan Gupt and discuss the various perspectives of nationalism.

Maithili Sharan Gupt's poems speak volumes of his nationalist fervor and his vision of a utopian independent India. He was writing at time when the high handed and arbitrary attitude of the British Government catapulted the call for freedom.

Just as with so many other facets of Indian life, British rule in India was instrumental in affecting and shaping the course of Indian literature. Vernacular as well as English writings of the nationalists displayed an acute awareness of Indian nationalism during and after the British period. The insights in the modern nationalist writings were distinct from the past in a sense that ideas which were being presented were more cohesive and structured. This was due to the benefit of added exposure and also as a measure of challenge from hostile and competing ideologies. (Saraswat, Sharma)

Besides, important developments like the formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885, separation of Bengal in 1905 along with the many freedom struggles that were escalating in the country also brought about awareness in the common people and inspired a spirit of nationalism in them. Authors and poets also joined the Nationalist movement through songs like *jaagan geets*, *prayaan geets* and poems in the 'veer rasa' and the people at large were called forth to join the freedom struggle. The glorious past of the country was also reiterated and the nation was given the persona of a 'mother' or 'shakti' in literature by poets and authors alike who created imaginary utopian states to sing the praise of the motherland. An important

literary trend that can be seen in the literature of this period particularly, in Hindi literature is the development of the humanist element. Authors, particularly poets, focused and projected the state of the country. Bhartendu Harishchandra and Acharya Mahaveer Prasad Dwivedi were the pioneers who voiced their concerns in their works on poverty, slavery and exploitation of the Indian people by the British. Maithili Sharan Gupt has the credit of carrying the torch of protest further.

Literature production in regional languages in British India can be taken as an indicator of ongoing shifts in identity construction and related identity politics. Modern Indian literature started off as a new form of creative interaction of Western and Eastern reflexivity. Traditions were reinterpreted, questioned, reconfirmed, and recovered under layers of decline and error, then recomposed and reconstructed. Cultural and religious defense strategies facing the challenge of a British-dominated concept of modernity and modernization were important motives of authors and critiques. Tradition was used as a tool to reassert self-consciousness threatened by colonial modernity. (Hinduism and modern literature)

British rule in India affected and reshaped every facet of Indian life and consequently the stand of authors in Indian literature whether of the regional or the national level, showed noticeably changed trends. The most cohesive idea being put forward through the huge panorama of English as well as regional or vernacular literatures was that of 'nationalism.' Literature, as a vehicle, helps to express nationalist ideas particularly well. If nations or nationalist movements are indeed identifiable entities moving forward in time, they need to speak, and literature gives them a voice to do just that. (bookworm) The genesis of 'nationalist spirit, in Indian literature was a consequence of raised consciousness about national identity and the nation's glorious heritage. Authors of all genres sought to bring about reawakening in the collective conscious through their writings. They stimulated the Indian mind by invoking the past glorious lofty ideals and rich traditions of India. The spirit of nationalism was projected in the finest writings through poetry, essays, novels, stories and plays in Hindi as well as in the vernacular literature,

The literature produced right from the Bhartendu Yuga (1852-1885) to the Uttar Chhayavad yuga(1904-48) mostly centers around raising the cultural consciousness and infusing the spirit of nationalism in the masses. Bhartendu Harish Chandra considered 'father of the modern Hindi Literature' and also the pioneer of the *navajagran* or renaissance in Hindi literature, had a remarkable expertise in all genres and styles. His wide range of writings is mostly based on social and cultural issues. He was the editor of the periodical *Harishchandran* (1872) and he vociferously put forth his views on nationalism by highlighting the need take pride in the valorous past of India in his works *Kashmir Kusum* and *Badshah Darpan* he criticizes the Muslim rulers who destroyed a prosperous Hindu nation. The Bhartendu Yuga was followed by yet another powerful author of modern hindi literature, Acharya Mahaveer Prasad Dwivedi, who established *khariboli* as the medium of expression in Hindi literature. He edited a literary journal *Saraswati* from 1903. Dwivedi's writings along with other contemporary authors reflected nationalism, patriotism, opposition to orthodoxy, folk life, nature, women's empowerment, humanitarianism and national idealism. Shridhar Pathak in his collection of inspirational poems entitled *Bharat Geet* (1928) portrays *Bharatvarsh* that is India as God incarnate. In his other poems Pathak has brought forth the ill effects of imperialism on the lives of the Indian masses. Jai Shankar Prasad an important poet of Chhayavaad yuga(1889-1937) holds an exalted place in Hindi literature not only because of *Kamayani* (1936) his magnum opus but also because of his other masterpieces like *Skandagupt* (1928), *Chandragupt* (1933) and *Dhruva Swami* (1933) to depict India's glorious past as well as a call for

meaningful cultural awakening. The play *Skand Gupt* is a warning of how internal strifes make a nation weak and vulnerable to foreign invasions. Ramdhari Singh Dinkar is a highly acclaimed poet of Hindi literature especially because his poems are imbued in *veer rasa* or valour. His poems such as 'Hunkaar' (1939), 'Kuruksheetra' (1946) and 'Rashmi Rathi' (1952) belong to his corpus of fire brand poems that range from rebellious poetry aimed at the British regime to insightful articles on Indian culture and its evolution.

Subhadra Kumari Chauhan is yet another name that gets a special mention in the league of Nationalist poets for her impassioned patriotic poetry. Besides her iconic poem 'Jhansi ki Rani,' (1930) her other popular poem is 'Veeron ka Vasant kaisa ho.' Acharya Chatursen, Amrit Lal Nagar and Shivaji Sawant experimented with retelling the stories of Indian epics in a new idiom to inspire the Indian masses to nationalism. Narendra Kohli is known for ushering in a new period of cultural renaissance in Hindi literature. In his retelling of the *Ramayana* as 'Abhyu Daya' (1989) Rama, the protagonist is a democratic and a crusader against evil. Ram is projected not as a king but as a leader of common people who seeks the support of the masses to bring about fundamental changes in the nation. Similar inspirational patriotic poems to raise awareness about the contemporary undignified state of the country and its people were also composed in regional literatures. Poems in urdu like *Musaddas* (1879) by Maulana Altaf Husain Hali and 'Bharat Darpan' (1905) by Kaifi and 'Amachya deshachi stithi', (1881) one of the many popular essays from *Nibundhmala* in Marathi by Vishnushastri Chiplunkar are especially noteworthy. Most of these works point at the fact that the British not only have sought control on the Indian territories but also on the Indian minds.

Nationalism is an enigmatic notion and writers have grappled with the idea of 'nation' before independence in diverse ways. While it is important to understand the basic criteria that define nationalism it is equally vital to understand the fundamental difference between the ideas that define a sovereign geographical entity in the West as a nation and those that are conceptualized by a freshly freed land with its boundaries artificially drawn by its colonial plunderers. (Shubhrashtra)

In general, it is an ideology in which nationality is a category by which humans define themselves. Nationalism necessarily categorizes people— one either is or is not a member of "my nation." It thrives through the use of such elements as national folklore, symbols, heroes, sports, music, religion, and the idea there is a national identity or character (Literary Nationalism)

According to Mahadevi Verma, a nation is simply not a conglomeration of mountains, rivers and plains. A nation according to her can be defined as the mutual coexistence of varied human groups who live and progress collectively in a piece of land. Implying that civilizations evolving and developing in a geographical area can be defined as a nation.

Anthony D. Smith, a theorist of nationalism, includes a physical homeland, either current or ancient; a high degree of autonomy among the citizens, hostile surroundings, memories of glory or defeat in battle, special customs, historical records, common languages and scripts, and what he calls sacred centers or places (17). This sort of nationalism is highly dependent on the concept of the nation-state and probably represents the most common use of the term. It has been used to justify imperialism, to unite countries in times of war, and to describe the struggles for nationhood in colonized countries such as Ireland and India. (book worm) (Literary Nationalism)

Benedict Anderson in his authoritative text, *Imagined Communities* (1983) defines the nation as an imagined political community. Anderson depicts a nation as a socially constructed community imagined by the people who perceive themselves as part of that group.

Tagore and Sri Aurobindo talk of nationalism more from a humanitarian and philosophical perspective that corresponds with the Indian philosophy of life. Tagore views nationalism thus: “the real problem in India is not political it is social ...it (the nation) is the aspect of a whole people as organized power. This organization incessantly keeps up the insistence of the population on becoming stronger and efficient.... man's power of sacrifice is diverted from his ultimate object which is moral to the maintenance of this organization which is mechanical(pg. 28). In a similar vein Sri Aurobindo says that “in India we do not recognize the nation as the highest synthesis to which we can rise. There is a higher synthesis, humanity..... within us today nationalism is our immediate practical faith and gospel not because it is the highest possible synthesis but because it must be realized in life if we are to have the chance of realizing others .

Much of the Literature of that time reveals that countless Indians in far off remote hamlets where neither aware of nation per se or the idea of ‘independence’ from the colonists. In her article Shubhrashtra cites the example of the renowned novelist Fanisihwar Nath Renu who celebrates India's newly acquired freedom from the Colonial rule in his Novel *Maila Anchal*, (1954) set in rural India, Renu drives home the point that the official handshakes gestures and signatures which decided the fate of the nation meant and signified nothing in the real India, where the majority of the Indians lived. Unable to grapple with the grand weight of history that was lifted from the Indian consciousness for the new nation state to emerge and define itself, the poor villagers went on with their normal lives oblivious to the sounds which were to shape India's destiny. no one had more than local interests

Other literary works, such as Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1983), are openly critical of nationalist movements, portraying them as dehumanizing groups that stress unity over humanity.

It can be said that Mahatma Gandhi's influence over Maithili Sharan Gupt is immensely reflected in his writings. Like Gandhi, nationalism for Gupt simply did not entail the spirit to oppose the colonial forces but also meant living in harmony with all communities and protecting the Indian culture. To this end too Maithili Sharan Gupt's contribution is exemplary because moral values, kinship, empathy for the underprivileged and freedom from the British have found place in his poems. It is noteworthy that his poems are simply not only propagandists but truly reflect the national consciousness. His nationalist spirit is very evident in his poem ‘Bharat Bharati’ which has been called epoch changing by Mahaveer Prasad Dwivedi. The landmark poem 'Bharat Bharati' was published in 1910 and it has been called the most impressive poem that addresses the Indian masses and gave them a call to take up arms for their motherland

In his poem ‘Bharat Bharati’ the poet brings forth the past glories of India, the present degradation and a call to the masses to stand up and correct it. The poem is an exhortation to the people of India whom Gupt pictures as fallen descendants of a resplendent lineage to awake from their everlasting slumber and save themselves from mediocrity. He optimistically entuses the Indian people to rise to the challenge with dedication and diligence so as to achieve the goal of independence for the nation. The poem contributed immensely in raising the spirit of nationalism in the public mind. This poem is a great example of the power of literature to inspire and mobilize masses for a national cause. Sections of this magnum opus were

sung in schools all over North India. It became so popular with the freedom fighter, especially in Bihar, that the British government felt threatened and a ban was imposed on its singing because it was inspiring people to fight the British. Acharya Mahaveer Prasad Dwivedi praised the poem and called it a literary piece with a potential to revolutionize the epoch

हम कौन थे क्या हो गए और क्या होंगे अभी  
आओ विचारे आज मिलकर यह समस्याएं सभी

Maithili Sharan Gupt adopts a very realistic stand as he believes that it is his duty to speak out the truth in this hour of national crisis he dwells upon the shortcomings of the people and the nation at large. At the very outset Gupt anticipates criticism from the readers for his harsh and even derogatory tone in which he addresses the public but he believes that a true patriot should not refrain from pointing out the stagnant, pathetic and unfortunate state of the country. In the preface of 'Bharat Bharati' he writes that it is extremely saddening that no book in Hindi has so far been written that speaks of either our "past developments and glory, present degradation or an ideal vision for the future." The faults that have led us to our indignity, misery and have made us a laughing stock for the world have never been enumerated. Is it wrong to bring them to light?

Despite the fact that Gupt was an avowed Hindu, devotee of Lord Rama, follower of Ramanandi Shrisampadai Sect and even composed a poem 'Hindu' to establish the importance of Hinduism, yet he believed that a true nationalist is above communal and regional considerations. The spirit of nationalism of Gupt is neither communal nor prejudiced. In his poem 'Kaaba aur Karbala', in two parts the poet advocates unity amongst people of different religions, as there is only one God. In his poem 'Matra Mandir', he invokes his mother land:

जाति-धर्म या संप्रदाय का नहीं भेद व्यवधान यहां  
राम रहीम बुद्ध ईसा का सुलभ एक सा ध्यान यहां

For Maithili Sharan Gupt equality for untouchables and subalterns was integral to the independence movement. Like Mahatma Gandhi, he believed that until people of all classes lived in equality any (Tagore, Nationalism) movement for independence was not only impossible but entirely meaningless. The poem with 'Vaitalik' composed in 1916 also aims to inspire the Indian people of their glorious past and the need to protect it.

फिर अपनों को याद करो उठो अलौकिक भाव भरो

'Swadesh Sangeet' composed in 1925 is a compilation of 65 poems which were inspired by the various freedom movements at that time. In this collection Maithili Sharan Gupt visualizes a golden future for India. He was a radical Hindu and expressed his sentiments in poems like 'Hindu' for him India or 'Bharatvarsh' represented a Hindu Nation yet he respected the cultural and religious differences of other religions and stressed upon the unity of the people of diverse faiths.

For people to unite and stand up for their nation it was important for Maithili Sharan Gupt that the masses take pride in the glorious past of India. To this end he based most of his works on religious, puranic and historical texts. This way he could bring people on a common footing and arouse the national consciousness. For instance his popular poem 'Saket', 'Panchwati' and 'Shakti' are based on the the *Ramayana* similarly 'Jaydratha Vadh', 'Sairandarhi', 'Jay Bharat' and 'Yuddha' are poems that have their source in the *Mahabharata*. He ignited the spirit of nationalism in people by raising their pride for their culture

and mobilized young people into action the exhorting them to stand up for the nation with courage. Using the sacred texts solved the dual purpose of bringing people on a common footing of religious fervor as well as crystallizing the element of pride in them and thereby arousing the feeling of nationalism amongst the masses.

Maithili Sharan Gupt's poems 'Bharat Bharti' and 'Saket', anticipate the Indian Independence a couple of decades in advance. As mentioned earlier Gupt's texts draw inspiration mostly from religious texts. A reading of 'Saket' reveals that it sensitively outlines the story of the *Ramayana* and primarily dwells upon the unvoiced pain of Urmila, the wife, of Laxman. Yet one can also identify the subtle political contexts underlying the poem. For Gandhi 'ram rajya' meant a liberated India not only politically but also one based on pure moral authority of its people. Inspired by Gandhi Maithili Sharan Gupt's 'Saket' tries to establish the concept of ram rajya. On one level 'Saket' unfolds the tale of Lord Rama who is a sovereign whose sense of morality and justice are exemplary. The fact that Gupt chose Ayodhya as an example to point out the virtues of an ideal king and an ideal state go to say that he too visualized such an independent India.

#### WORKS CITED

1. Akshaya Kumar (2007) Negotiating Nationalism(s): Hindi Poetry During and After the Colonial Period, *South Asian Review*, 28:2, 47-75, DOI: 10.1080/02759527.2007.11932516
2. "Literary Nationalism" <https://litteracle.com/category/themes-in-literature/page/3/> August 20 2012. bookworm
3. scroll.in dot why Indian literature holds the key to the the Texas nationalism debate <https://scroll.in/article/813998>
4. Sri Aurobindo. *Karmayogin: Political Writings and Speeches (1909 — 1910)* // Sri Aurobindo Birth Century Library: Set in 30 volumes.- Volume 2.- Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1972.- 441 p.
5. *Swarajya* Culture magazine Oct 4, 2014
6. Tagore, Rabindranath. Nationalism. Alexandria: Library o Alexandria, 1920.
7. Vikas Saraswat Dr Veena Sharma. "Nationalism in Modern Hindi Literature: Six Portraits"